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Castro's Spies Are No Longer Teenagers

Cuba's intelligence community, trained and controlled by the Soviet Union, has come of age.

By David Atlee Phillips

FIDEL CASTRO, soon after becoming Cuba's newest dictator in the early hours of the first day of 1959, dispatched fledgling spies abroad to provide intelligence support for the export of his revolution. Some of his agents were teenagers who had fought with Castro during his two years in the Sierra Maestre mountains. The raw intelligence operatives were ridiculed from Mexico City to Tokyo when they pretended to be diplomats. Castro's spies could be spotted easily at embassy receptions, with their long hair, unkempt beards, ill-fitting black suits and, invariably, hip bulges which scarcely concealed a Colt .45-caliber automatic pistol, favored weapon of the General Directorate of Intelligence (DGI).

The DGI was Cuban in its early period, but was nursed through growing pains by the Committee of State Security, the Soviet secret service known as the KGB. From the beginning the Russians molded the DGI into its own image. KGB instructors taught Cubans the tradecraft of clandestine operations before they were posted overseas. Soon the appearance of DGI agents changed—their hair was trimmed, cut of clothing improved and ostentatious handguns were replaced with more discreet sidearms.

RESISTS SOVIET CONTROL

While Castro welcomed Soviet tutelage for the DGI, he resisted KGB schemes to control his intelligence service. His trusted DGI chief, Manuel Pineiro, had studied at Columbia University in New York, was married to an American and suspected Russian motives. Pineiro kept an eye on the KGB colonel who worked in an adjacent office. Other Soviet officers occupied advisory positions in the DGI and Pineiro watched them, too, reporting to his "maximum chief," Fidel Castro.

The tricks of the espionage trade taught by KGB officers to DGI agents were tested in the field when Castro attempted to export his revolution, often violently, to most of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Kremlin did not approve; the Politburo considered the adventures foolhardy and, worse, they didn't conform to the party line. The Soviets discouraged Castro's revolutionary antics, suggesting that he subvert his enemies quietly, Russian-style.

When Fidel Castro spurned Soviet political guidance the DGI became a chip in a game of power poker between the KGB on one side and, on the other, Castro and Pineiro.

By late 1961 Soviet bids to win control of the DGI became increasingly blatant. Some Cuban agents sent to Moscow for training were recruited by the KGB; others refused Russian blandishments, and reported the pitch to Pineiro. Fidel Castro tolerated the intrigue for over a year before he called the Soviet bluff. In a March 1962, television harangue—three hours on camera, shorter than most of his speeches—Castro castigated the Soviets for maneuvering to steal his revolution and suborn his secret service.

The contest for power in Cuba continued for six years. Then, in early 1968, Castro again challenged the Russians by jailing 34 pro-Moscow Cuban officials.

Then the Russians played the oil card.

Petroleum shipments from the Black Sea to Cuban ports dwindled to a trickle and, in some cases, dried up completely. "The oil refineries are shut down for repairs," was the official Russian explanation. The Cuban economy sagged disastrously. Castro wanted desperately to call the Soviet hand Once he ordered a census of Cuban oxen in the vain hope that the sugar harvest could be reaped without Russian fuel. The economy neared collapse.

FIDEL ACQUIESCES

Castro threw in his hand in the aftermath of the Prague Spring of 1968, when the Czech uprising was crushed by Soviet tanks. Except in Chile, leaders of every Communist Party in Latin America abandoned the party line to denounce the Soviets. Cubans expected Castro to join the chorus of condemnation in a television speech. The Russian ambassador met Castro privately. Perhaps the subject of discussion was oil. Whatever was said, Fidel Castro's speech, brief and blunt, stunned Cubans—he praised the Russians.

The Soviets had won the winner-take-all game. Cuba became a Russian stooge in international affairs, after Castro agreed not to criticize Soviet policy and to accept 5,000 Soviet specialists to run the Cuban economy. In the intelligence arena, the DGI became a KGB surrogate. Manuel Pineiro was demoted; the new DGI chief reported directly to the KGB; and Cuban spies around the world received new orders from headquarters. In Paris, the DGI chief summoned his staff and announced, "We are closer to the Soviets now." Asked to explain, he read aloud from the message from Havana: "We are working for our associates, and will be taking on some of their jobs."

One job the Cubans undertook for the KGB in 1971 in England was a rescue mission. The British government, exasperated by proliferating Soviet espionage activity, expelled 107 Russian diplomats. Without case officers to steer them, KGB networks foundered. But, a DGI defector in London later revealed, Cuban agents stepped in to handhold Soviet spies and keep espionage operations afloat until the KGB was able to replenish its staff with fresh diplomats.

The Soviets, through the DGI and, to a lesser extent, their military intelligence service, the Chief Directorate of the Soviet General Staff (GRU), used Cuban agents to their advantage during the 1970s. Castro's spies were especially useful in Africa and the Middle East. With the DGI pursuing Soviet ends, KGB advisors no longer discouraged violence in Cuban adventurism. KGB personnel and financing helped transform the island of Cuba into a vast academy for guerrillas and terrorists from more than 50 countries.

A lesson in Soviet endorsement of violence, and Cuban promotion of it, is found in the principal textbook provided to students in secret schools in Cuba, a book published *after* the Russians were in charge. "Terrorism," instructs the *Mini Manual of the Urban Guerrilla*, "is an action that the urban guerrilla must execute with the greatest coldbloodedness, calmness and decision." Students learn that assassination requires only a single